

VZCZCXR06639
PP RUEHBZ RUEHDU RUEHJO RUEHMR RUEHRN
DE RUEHLU #0615 2211530
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 081530Z AUG 08
FM AMEMBASSY LUANDA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4956
INFO RUCNSAD/SOUTHERN AF DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY COLLECTIVE

UNCLAS LUANDA 000615

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

PASS TO USAID/IMCNAIRN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM AO
SUBJECT: CIVIL SOCIETY ANNOUNCES ELECTION OBSERVATION PLAN

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: In a July 25 press conference, the NGO Plataforma Eleitoral (Electoral Platform) announced its plan for civil observation of the September 5 legislative elections. The Plataforma plans to deploy 2,623 civil society observers on election day, providing electoral observation in all 18 provinces and in 54% of Angola's 163 municipalities. As civil society observation was not permitted in the failed 1992 elections, the Plataforma's efforts are viewed as an important building block in the construction of a credible, transparent electoral process, as well as an important learning experience for Angola's largely nascent civil society. END SUMMARY

Observation Methods: Deep, not Wide

¶2. (U) The Plataforma, a national umbrella organization for election-related NGOs in all 18 provinces, built on lessons learned while monitoring the electoral registration process to develop the electoral observation plan. With the support of the USAID-funded National Democratic Institute (NDI), the Plataforma worked to create a feasible and realistic plan, given the limited financial means of its member NGOs and logistical constraints faced in the provinces. Key logistical hurdles include a) the lack of transportation in a country in which few own cars or motorbikes and most rural roads are unimproved or unusable due to landmine contamination, and b) communication, as the majority of rural areas are not covered by the oversubscribed and notoriously unreliable cell phone network, and only provincial capitals are connected to equally unreliable landlines.

¶3. (SBU) Rather than overly stretch its limited capacities in what it hopes is the first of a series of election observation efforts, the Plataforma has planned deep, rather than wide, coverage for these elections. Its 2,623 observers will cover 88 (54 percent) of Angola's 163 municipalities. 702 observers, or 26 percent, will be used in Luanda alone, as Luanda represents the largest single slice of the electorate. Observers will stay at one polling station from opening to closing and take note of issues such as the atmosphere around the polling stations, setup of the voting stations and conduct of electoral officials, and attempts to influence voters. While the Plataforma's volunteers will not conduct exit polls, it is exploring the possibility of conducting a small pilot program of parallel vote tabulation (PVT) using a limited number of volunteers, in order to study the feasibility of conducting PVT on a wider scale in the Presidential elections currently slated for fall 2009 and local elections planned for 2010 or 2011. The organization is also experimenting with various means of transmitting information, such as text messages with information that can then be plugged into a central national database.

Additional Challenges: Recruitment and Training

¶4. (SBU) Additional challenges include the recruitment and

training of observers; as the only other election in Angolan history were 16 years ago, many potential observers have never actually participated in or seen an election. In order to create a standardized observation techniques, the Plataforma, in coordination with the National Democratic Institute (NDI), is implementing a "train-the-trainer" training plan at the national, provincial and municipal levels. A team of Plataforma supervisors and NDI consultants will visit training events to ensure standardization.

¶15. (U) NDI's funding, training and technical assistance for the Plataforma is made possible by funding from USAID's Consortium for Elections and Political Process Strengthening (CEPPS). Other donors include the EU, DFID, Spain, and Norway.

¶16. (SBU) COMMENT: The Plataforma faces clear organizational and operational challenges in this effort, but its leaders are motivated by the important role played by civil society observers in Zimbabwe's elections. While the Plataforma would like to provide more extensive coverage for Angola's upcoming race, neither the national organization nor its provincial counterparts (known as the "rede eleitoral", or electoral network) has the funding for, or even more importantly, the human capacity to effectively execute such an operation. By showing it can successfully a smaller-scale observation effort this go around, the Plataforma can then look to expand operations for future elections. END COMMENT
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